DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 191 103 CS 502 997

AUTHOR Wills, J. Robert
TITLE Women in Theatre Administration: A Dean's View.
PUB DATE Aug 80
NOTE 15p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Theatre Association (44th, San Diego, CA, August 10-13, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Role: Career Awareness: Career Development: *Careers: Employed Women: *Employment Opportunities: *Females: Higher Education: *Theater Arts

ABSTRACT

Statistics reveal that only 11% of the 1,500 theatre administrators on United States college campuses are women. On the other hand, recent surveys have indicated that few women are actively seeking administrative positions. The situation is unfortunate since campus theatres and institutions of higher education need highly qualified, capable leaders--regardless of sex. For women who are seeking an administrative role and for others who might be induced to change their career goals to encompass academic administration, six points of advice might be helpful: women (1) should not lock themselves into doing only what they are doing currently, no matter how much they enjoy doing it: (2) should build faculty credentials and be prepared to travel the traditional route of academic advancement: (3) should insist that their own institutions adhere to the principles of affirmative action: (4) should make connections if they plan to look for employment elsewhere: (5) should decide how mobile they are: and (6) should be prepared to use their theatre education and experience as training grounds for academic administration, since both demand similar skills such as planning, managing resources, meeting deadlines, encouraging productivity, solving problems, and establishing leadership style. (FL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED191103

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

J. Robert Wills
College of Fine Arts
University of Kentucky
Lexington, Kentucky 40506

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Robert Wills

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Women in Theatre Administration: A Dean's View

Let me begin by sharing with you some rather surprising if not unexpected information. Of the 1500 theatre administrators on American college campuses, 89% are men. The remaining minority are women.[1]

Most of these women, however, consider directing, not administration, to be their primary theatre concern.[2] Thus, in at least one sense, they can be glad for their campus careers, where they represent 11% of the national leadership. Had they chosen to direct in film,

CS512997

as you may know, their chances for success would have been considerably less, for of the 7,332 movies released by major studios since 1950, women have directed only fourteen.[3] The situation in television is even worse. Of the 65,500 hours of prime time drama produced since 1949, for example, women have directed all of 105 hours.[4] By comparison, then, campus theatre programs look like the fully liberated bastion of women's endeavors. While those in that bastion may decry the minority they actually are, they cannot share the dire lament of the Women's Committee of the Director's Guild of America, which represents film directors. As one of its members has said, "Do we dare plan a career hoping to be among the two-tenths of one per cent?"[5] Being among the 11% must surely be better.

On the other hand, any woman in theatre searching for an advancing career may well wish she lived in Iceland. There, if you haven't heard, 145,000 voting citizens recently elected a woman theatre director, Vigdis Finnbogadottir, president of their island republic, making her--she claims--the world's first freely elected woman head of state.[6]

The particular woman under discussion today, however, has chosen neither television nor film nor Iceland. Rather, she has staked out the American college campus, and she not only directs--or in a few isolated cases designs--she also administers an academic theatre program. There are now about

175 such women, spread across the land in every state but two, yet we know very little about them, collectively. Consequently, as many of you know, I recently surveyed these women theatre administrators to discover who they are, what they think of their jobs, why there aren't more of them and what advice they might offer to women colleagues just beginning an administrative career.[7] Highlights from the results of that survey, which both confirm and deny earlier beliefs, have been published in the ACA Bulletin and further duplicated for those in the ATA Women's Program; I won't dwell on them here. But let me describe for you the typical woman theatre administrator as her profile emerged from the data submitted.

Though no single individual probably fits this "average" description, she is a tenured, senior-ranked professor with a Ph.D. who earns an annual salary of $20,000. Unmarried and over fifty years of age, she works at a two-year institution or a small, four-year liberal arts college and has been employed in her current position for eight years. She is committed more to teaching and directing than to administration, and she is highly vocal about this commitment. As a result, she would consider continuing in her role as a theatre administrator ("after all," she says, "someone has to do it"), but under no circumstances would she accept the

opportunity to become a dean, vice-president or president. In fact, she vehemently dislikes administration, considers herself largely unsupported by specific administrators on her own campus, and feels far removed from any informal nationwide network comprised of her male counterparts. In addition, she feels overworked, underpaid and often unappreciated. Still, she expresses satisfaction with her position, primarily because of freedom granted to her program and because of rewarding contact with students. While she acknowledges many problems and obstacles which face her as an administrator, she sees few if any of these stemming from her status as a woman. She is, she thinks, not the victim of any sexual discrimination.[8]

My concerns as a result of this profile--in relation to today's topic--are at least twofold: 1) that institutions of higher education, especially those which offer a full range of undergraduate and graduate opportunities, have obviously failed to identify, consider and employ women as theatre program administrators; and 2) that too few women in academic theatre, for whatever reasons, have career aspirations which would place them in positions of greater challenge and responsibility. These are, to my mind, separate but related issues, and I want to explore each of them with you briefly, from the vantage point of an academic dean. (In fairness, I should tell you that women in the

recent survey saved their most vitriolic comments for male academic deans.)

To begin, let me state the obvious: institutions of higher education throughout the country have been woefully neglectful in considering women for administrative positions, and, in spite of limited improvement in recent years, affirmative action programs designed to correct the situation have thus far evidently proved essentially ineffective. The result of such benign neglect--or, in some cases, outright discrimination--can be easily seen: only 11% of campus theatre administrators are women, and most of these work for relatively small, low-powered programs of local rather than regional or national consequence, even though women represent almost one third (32%) of the terminal degrees awarded in theatre over the last decade[9] and about 26% of the total available workforce in academic theatre.[10]

Even worse results appear at higher levels of administration. Of the 139 members of the International Council of Fine Arts Deans, for example, only six are women, and only one of these comes from a theatre background.[11]

Any conclusion seems obvious. If there are qualified women in theatre searching for administrative positions at departmental or higher levels, institutions of higher education either cannot find them or, having found them, do not employ them.

The "if" in that last sentence, however, is a large one; it may even remove some of the stigma of discrimination from institutions and their hiring practices. The blunt truth is this: very few qualified women actually search for administrative positions. Of the women who responded to the survey, for example, a full 35% hoped to escape administration as soon as possible. Another 58% hoped to continue their current responsibilities, but most only on their current campuses. As for becoming a dean, vice-president or president, 70% reported they would not accept such a position if it were offered to them. Only four women indicated they were actively seeking such a position. In other words, the women currently employed as campus theatre administrators represent essentially an immobile group who will not and cannot be enticed to similar or higher administrative positions elsewhere. In like manner--and this observation is based more on repeated experience than on confirmed data--it would seem that few women actively seek a first administrative position. Most often, they are either appointed on their own campuses simply because an administrative vacancy occurs, or they choose employment in a one person department, thus becoming an administrator by default.

Where, then, are the theatre women who can fill positions of administrative responsibility? Some do exist, to be sure, probably in numbers larger than the record suggests, but for the most part, women in theatre remain outside the administrative talent pool. Why? Perhaps they are content in faculty positions; perhaps they carry such enormous prejudice against administration that it prohibits a career change in that direction; or perhaps, as journalist Patricia O'Brien has suggested in a different context, they see administration as a goal beyond reach, as an "impossible fantasy," one which symbolizes much that is "wrong with the way women have been trained to think of themselves," one which fulfills "every cliche about limited aspirations."[12] Whatever the reason, the resulting situation--in which few women have significant administrative responsibility at the department or college level--works to the great disadvantage of theatre, of higher education and of women themselves. Campus theatre and institutions of higher learning need highly qualified, capable leaders, regardless of sex; and women, like men, need aspirations which can fulfill their highest and best capabilities, whatever these are.

Let me switch tracks, then, and speak directly for a moment to those women who <u>are</u> in that limited administrative talent pool--both those who would seek such a position for the first time and those who hope to advance in their already established administrative careers. At the same time, let me also speak to those who might, just might, consider changing their career goals to encompass academic administration as a possibility.

What follows are six brief points of advice concerning strategies for women in administration.

1) Don't lock yourself into doing only what you're doing now, no matter how much you enjoy doing it. Personal growth and career development over a period of years may lead to a re-evaluation of wants, needs and rights, may even lead quite naturally to changing career goals. In fact, the average person now changes careers several times during his or her working life. A career shift from doing to leading, from making theatre to making theatre possible, from theatre to all the arts, or from whatever to whatever, could lead to administration--and regardless of arguments to the contrary, the potential for causing change,

for strengthening programs, for encouraging creativity, for affecting students, for generating excellence and for sustaining self-fulfillment is greater in the administrative office then in the classroom or rehearsal hall. I must emphasize, however, that marrying administration--or even just living with it for awhile--need not necessarily mean divorcing either teaching or production. Many administrators continue to be active in their disciplines; many administrative positions require such activity.

At the same time, I should caution you--and this is addressed especially to those who hope to advance in administration beyond the department level--you will have to overcome your background. (And I don't mean being born female.) It is a sad commentary on our discipline that very few deans, even fewer vice-presidents and evidently no current presidents in higher education spring from theatre. This represents, frankly, a lingering, deep-seated and pervasive prejudice against our field, one which women, like their male colleagues, must recognize and try to change.

Anyway, explore the possibilities. Keep trying to discover fresh answers to the question, "What do I want to be when I grow up?"

2) Build faculty credentials. On most campuses candidates for administrative positions are screened first by faculty search committees, and such committees--which tend to be conservative in both process and action--look

initially for faculty achievement rather than administrative expertise. In fact, most administrative job announcements include some specific criteria for this, usually stated in a phrase like "appropriate credentials to warrant appointment to the faculty at the rank of Professor." This means building a firm record in teaching, research and service, a record which can compete at the highest levels of our discipline. Without such a record, any administrative career will stop before it starts.

As a corollary to this, be prepared to travel the traditional route of academic advancement. Whatever the current management needs of higher education actually are, campus administrators still tend to rise through the ranks by climbing a conventional ladder, and then only after serving an appropriate novitiate in academe. This normal route, as you know, begins with successful faculty accomplishment followed by appointment as Chair, then Dean, Vice President and President, all in sequential order.[13] Few people advance in any other way.

3) Insist that your own institution adhere to the principles of affirmative action. As a rule, "colleges and universitities are not champions of new and more meritocratic hiring strategies,"[14] which means, in part, that most administrative positions--more than half, actually-- get filled by persons who already work at the employing institution.[15] Your chances for advancement may be strongest where you are.

4) If you insist on looking elsewhere, make connections. Though the "old boy" network may be in painfully slow decline, even as the new "old girl" network begins development, 76% of all administrative positions still go to persons who are either invited to apply or who are nominated. Only 24% of the positions go to persons who apply directly without any prior contact with the institution or with individuals involved in the hiring process.[16] The operative guidelines, then, seem simple: when looking for a position, you'll do best if someone nominates you; you'll do even better if your nominator is from within the employing institution.

5) Decide how mobile you are. As a general rule, and here relatively new data confirms the obvious, women of higher rank are less mobile than women of lower rank; married women are less mobile than unmarried women.[17] Mobility, however, is relative. Times have changed. And, twenty miles is different from 2000 miles. Interestingly enough, 79% of the persons, male or female, who accept new administrative positions move no further than across a neighboring state line.[18]

6) Finally, be prepared to use your theatre education and experience as training ground for academic administration. Both fields demand similar skills, skills which involve nothing more nor less than planning, managing resources, meeting deadlines, encouraging productivity, solving problems,

making decisions, sharing vision, facilitating cooperation, establishing leadership style--and all those other traits which those in theatre use daily. The administrative territory, in other words, is neither mystical, magical nor foreign, and it is especially accessible to theatre people.

In conclusion, let me share with you a thought from Lewis B. Mayhew's excellent recent book titled Surviving the Eighties, a manual designed for primarily for college and university administrators. In the Preface Dr. Mayhew writes, "Although the number of women entering the top levels of college administration is growing, most of those I saw in connection with this study were men, hence the use of he throughout the book."[19] I would hope, when Surviving the Nineties is written, assuming that we do survive the eighties, that such a statement is more difficult to make--and that women with a background in theatre administration are a large part of that difficulty.

Notes

[1]This statistic is derived from the listing of Directors of Theatre in the 1979 Directory of the American Theatre Association. The percentage has remained fairly constant for all years since 1976.

[2]This is one finding in a recently completed survey of women in theatre administration. The full survey will be discussed later in this paper.

[3]Aljean Harris, "Women Don't Get Many Chances to Sit in Director's Chair," New York Times News Service, reprinted in The Lexington Herald (KY), June 26, 1980.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Associated Press news release, reprinted in The Lexington Leader (KY), June 30, 1980/

[7]The survey was sent to 168 women theatre program administrators. The return rate was 44%.

[8]Further data from the survey mentioned in the paper will not be noted.

[9]Mary Lou McCauliff, Availability Data and Recruitability Factors for Academic Units in Communications and Fine Arts, Southern Illinois University, College of Communications and Fine Arts, 1979.

[10]Affirmative Action data provided by Office of Affirmative Action, University of Kentucky.

[11]The ICFAD Directory, 1979.

[12]Patricia O'Brien, "Cosmo Girl: Selling the Same Old Inadequacy," Knight-Ridder Newspapers, reprinted in The Lexington Herald (KY), July 3, 1980.

[13]Daniel J. Socolow, "How Administrators Get Their Jobs," Change, May, 1978, p. 42.

[14]Ibid., p. 54

[15]Ibid., p. 43

[16]Ibid., p. 43

[17]McCauliff, Availability Data.

[18]Socolow, p. 42

[19]Lewis B. Mayhew, Surviving the Eighties (San Francisco: Jossey-Boss, Inc., 1979).